

News Release - December 14, 2005

NC Turnpike Authority Agrees to Study I-540 as Potential Toll Road

RALEIGH - At the request of five area mayors, the North Carolina Turnpike Authority Board today agreed to examine the financial feasibility of tolling the western and southern portions of Interstate 540 in Wake County.

The decision came at the board's monthly meeting after hearing a resolution of support for the study from mayors of Apex, Cary, Fuquay-Varina, Garner and Holly Springs. The resolution asked the N.C. Turnpike Authority to conduct a detailed feasibility study to determine the viability of developing the western and southern portions of I-540 as two phases of a single turnpike project.

"We will conduct detailed studies over the next several months to determine expected traffic counts and potential revenue if the road is built as a toll road," said David Joyner, executive director of the NCTA. "Those studies should be completed by either next spring or summer."

The N.C. Department of Transportation has already completed the initial planning and environmental work for the western portion of I-540 that will stretch from N.C. 55 near Morrisville to N.C. 55 near Holly Springs. But because funds must be equitably allocated throughout the state, construction on that section is not due to begin for at least another six years with estimated completion in 2022.

If the project is developed as a toll road, construction could begin as early as 2007 with completion around 2011. Construction of the southern portion was expected to begin even later with the earliest estimated completion date of 2032.

Joyner said that building toll roads offer motorists an option for getting highways built sooner because they are financed, in part, through bond sales instead of relying totally on limited transportation dollars.

"Local support is critical to the success of the development of this project as a toll road," he said. "Ultimately, it is up to the local citizens and business community to decide whether they want this highway developed as a toll road."

The N.C. Turnpike Authority is authorized to plan, develop, operate and maintain up to nine toll roads in the state. The board announced last February plans to study four potential toll road projects; a fifth project was added in August. Law prohibits the authority prohibited from tolling existing roads*.

*In July 2006, Senate Bill 1381 was amended to allow the tolling of a segment of I-540 under construction as of July 1, 2006, located in Wake and Durham counties and extending from I-40 southwest to NC-55, with the approval of the local Metropolitan Planning Organization.